

ELSAH HISTORY

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In the Presence of the Past



*The Ice House after a late March snowstorm; see pages 5-6 for Ice House plans.
Photo by Tim Tomlinson.*

The Village Directory, published by *Historic Elsah Foundation* as a public service, is now available to all residents of Elsah and to members on application. The 2013 edition of the *The Village Directory* has been put together in large part by former HEF president and Life Member Marie Oleson, with help from Village Clerk Connie Peters. Karen Grimmer and Kim Howland provided essential information for Principia College personnel. It is free to all people who are listed in it.

The *Second Saturday Dances* have been growing in popularity and are increasingly well attended. The next Dance is scheduled for September 14, 2013, from 7 PM to 10 PM. The Dances are made possible through the volunteer efforts of Mark and Susan Young, Village residents. Think about attending these fun events. Admission is reasonable, parking is free, and refreshments are available.

The *Hosmer-Williams Lecture Series* for 2013 has been very well attended. The first lecture was presented on March 14 at Farley's Music Hall to an enthusiastic audience by St. Louis horticulturist and garden designer Chuck Szweda. St. Louis historian

Easley Hamilton spoke in May on *Lucy Semple Ames*, daughter of Elsah founder General James Semple. Lucy Semple Ames was a formidable late 19th century lady of "high society," college educated, a feminist and suffragette, and a successful businesswoman. Her estate on what is now the main Principia campus, *Notch Cliff*, was a fine example of the Victorian summer estate. The June lecture, co-sponsored with the Chautauqua Historical Society, featured Alicia Scott, great granddaughter of a Union soldier who survived the sinking of the steamer *Sultana* in May, 1865. Tim Tomlinson will lecture on *The du Ponts, America's Royal Family of Gardening* on October 17, 2013, and John Williams will speak on *Upton, Downton: Social Class in Elsah Village of Long Ago*, on November 14, 2013. Williams is a past president of HEF.

If you are in the area, taking pictures at the Ice House, admiring the Village and its historic properties, or strolling about, take time to stop at our new eatery on LaSalle Street, *The Cultured Table*. Go to culturedtablebistro.com for more information. The *Village Museum* is open through October. For more information, go to <http://www.greatriverroad.com/cities/Elsah>

Elsah History is published by *Historic Elsah Foundation*. A subscription to the newsletter is included with membership.

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Membership levels for 2013:

Patron	\$25 to \$99
Supporter	\$100 to \$249
Founders' Circle	\$250 and above
James Semple Business Associate	\$100

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Please send membership applications or letters to *Historic Elsah Foundation*, P. O. Box 117, Elsah, IL 62028
618-374-1059
www.historicelsah.org

The purposes of *Historic Elsah Foundation* as stated in the Articles of Incorporation (1971) are:

...the preservation and enhancement of the historic buildings, houses, architecture and culture of the Village of Elsah, Illinois, the historic areas, the publication of historical brochures, pamphlets, and periodicals regarding the Village, and the establishment of an educational program to inform the general public of the historical and the educational values of the Village.

In
Remembrance
James K. Schmidt

The Village of Elsah lost an important and loving supporter with the passing on the 27th of March, 2013, of James Kirbye Schmidt, the artist, and Professor *emeritus*, Principia College. Jim, as he was known to all of us, was strongly inspired by Elsah's mixture of old stone, brick and wooden houses with their white picket fences, surrounded by woods and fields of weeds.

His art captured Elsah again and

again in its many guises, and its shapes were an inspiration to the design patterns of his printed textiles. The most recent showing of his work, "Eye Witness," an exhibit in 2009 at the Jacoby Arts Center, illustrated and confirmed the importance of Elsah to Jim's work.

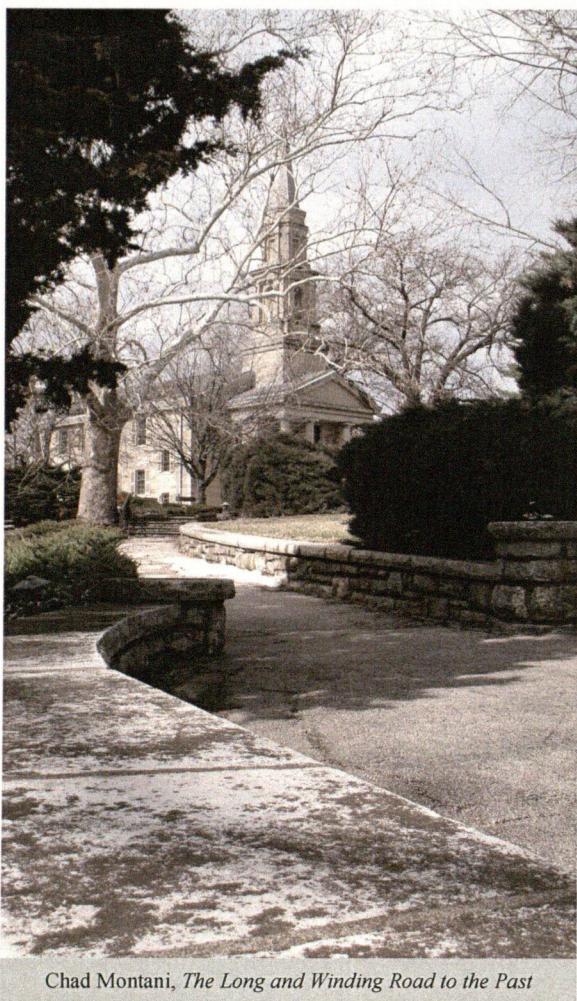
Jim knew as a young boy that he was going to be an artist. After his service in the U.S. Army Air Force he attended Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Mich. where he received his B.F.A. in design, and his M.F.A. in painting. In 1952, he was awarded a scholarship to study at the University of Paris, and while there he met his future wife, the ballerina Mary Elisabeth Loraine from the U.K.

Five years later, in 1957, the couple was at Principia, where Jim began his long teaching career. Jim was a truly inspired artist and teacher, and a most kind and courtly person. His work was always full of joy. He had a real interest in the village and served on the Village Board and the Museum Advisory Committee, and his artistic sense of beauty was always of great support. Mary taught ballet, at times in a pre-restored Farley's, and looked after the needs of their three children, Penny, Rob, and Ben. They had chosen to live in Elsah, in the Gate Lodge, and nothing was more charming than to see the young couple stroll through the early Elsah summer evening. This ended when the flood of 1973 forced them to move to higher ground to a subdivision off Beltrees Road.

Seven years after his wife's passing in 1977, Jim married Mary Anne Davis Schulz. Together they supported several community organizations (Mary Anne is on the HEF Board) while Jim still painted, taught and lectured. In fact, one of the most memorable "talks" HEF ever offered was Jim's talk about his understanding of ART.



Jim and Mary Anne Schmidt, photo by Inge Mack.



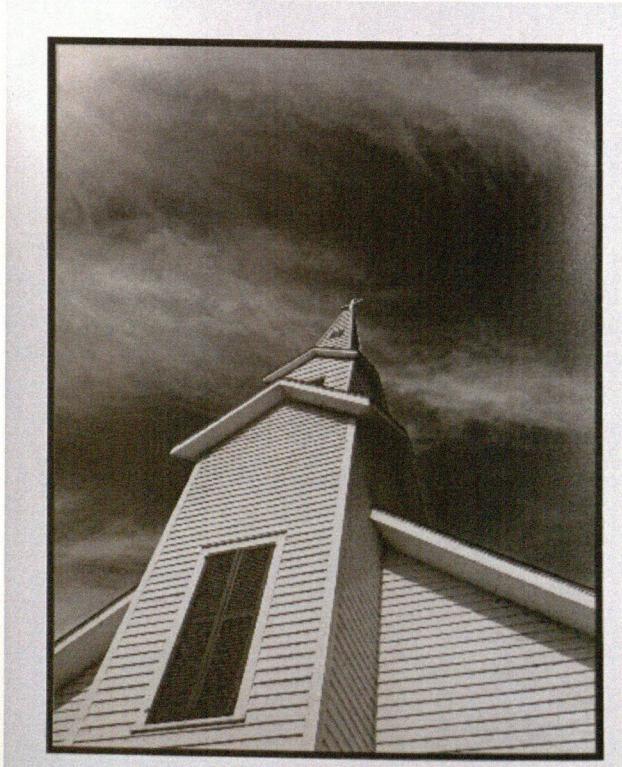
Chad Montani, *The Long and Winding Road to the Past*

Since 2000, the Village of Elsah has sponsored an annual exhibit to "celebrate and foster an appreciation of the beauty and unique qualities of Elsah and the immediate area in every season." A new theme is chosen every year. The first place prize is a purchase prize of \$150 for the matted print.

This year there were two purchase prizes. One was for an image taken in the valley and the second was for an image taken in the surrounding bluffs and valleys. The Village of Elsah sponsored the purchase prize for the valley and Greatriverroad.com sponsored the purchase prize for the surrounding area. The 2013 winners were chosen by Janice Nesser-Chu, a photography professor at St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley. Chu is also a working artist.

The Greatriverroad.com purchase prize was awarded to Chad Montani of Chesterfield, Missouri. The title of his work is *The Long and Winding Road to the Past*. His image was a walkway on the Principia College campus that winds around the Green to the Chapel. The theme was expressed in the aged limestone walled walk to the Chapel. The Chapel was partially hidden behind the trees. The digital image was printed mainly in gray scale, but a subtle addition of the green in the grass and foliage added to composition, adding meaning to the image. Two parallel lines were created by the steeple and a nearby tree. The steeple and tree were of the same color value, emphasizing the parallel of nature, man and God.

The Village of Elsah purchase prize was awarded to Karen King of Mount Olive, Illinois for her work titled, *Perseverance*. The United Methodist Church steeple photograph focused on an important building in the Village, one with particular meaning. The sky was dark and cloudy and the white steeple appeared to reach into that darkness. The entire image was in clear focus.



Karen King, *Perseverance*

For many visitors to Elsah, the Ice House is a sharp vision of how history can work, and how time can cause buildings (and people) to change. Sometimes it's for the better, sometimes for the worse.

The Ice House remnant (some say *ruin*) started as a neat little stone cottage with two chimneys, a cellar and two rooms. Over time it lost its residents and became



Early view of Ice House, from Mill Street, photo from Historic Elsah Foundation collection.

an ice house, thanks to a fairly deep cellar. In its final stage it was a storage place.

Eric Mack, local architectural historian, shared some information with us:

The type of building that stood there is called a *double pen*: a one-story structure divided into two rooms by a centrally located partition. Each gable end had a chimney, and the long side faced the street. Many of the early buildings in Elsah used this layout. The point of divergence for the Ice House is that the fireplaces were no longer in wide use, having been replaced by cast iron stoves. We don't yet know when it became an ice house (maybe the 1920s), nor do we know when it ceased activities (probably the late 1930s). The closest we can come is that by the 1940s the roof had collapsed, leaving a U-shaped stone wall and a 30-foot-long wooden storage shed to one side.

Like all unused buildings, eventually this one met its last days. Villagers hope it can remain a dignified ruin and serve the many visitors who enjoy its charm and grace. Since it is nearly the first thing tourists see on entering Elsah, it tends to shape their reaction to the

whole village. "It's so picturesque!" "It's so charming!"

In 1995, when Historic Elsah Foundation learned that the building could be purchased, it was immediately interested. An anonymous donor sent HEF a letter and a certified check for \$5,000. The letter stated the money was to be used to buy the Ice House ruin. HEF could keep the structure as a ruin or rebuild it. However, the letter declared, if rebuilt, it could not be used for commercial or residential purposes.

The HEF Board liked the idea of keeping it as a ruin, but had questions before accepting the gift:

- Preserving Farley's was HEF's first obligation. Could we wait until work at Farley's was completed before turning our thoughts to restoring the Ice House?
- What would restoration involve, and what would it cost?
- Liability—could it be added to the Village's insurance policy, as Farley's had been?



Model of Ice House built by Glen Felch, courtesy of Village of Elsah Museum; photo by George Cooke.

Knowing that all of the questions had not been answered fully, the donation was accepted and HEF bought the property.

The challenge for HEF was how to deal with a ruin, however charming, without adequate resources to do much of anything to restore the structure.

In 1999 funds were raised to stabilize the walls and to fill in the gaping cellar with quarry waste to provide a "floor." Occasionally, over the next several years, volunteers cleaned the area of plant material and other debris. The Foundation faithfully paid property taxes to Jersey County. Only recently was the site exempted from taxes because of HEF's not for profit status.

From the beginning, the Board was aware of two basic choices: return the structure to some former state, or maintain it as a ruin. An additional thought persisted. Was there a way to keep the ruin and at the same time provide a visual suggestion of the original building? This thought was based on renowned architect Robert Venturi's "ghost structure" design for the Benjamin



Franklin Court Ghost Structure, photo courtesy of Google Images

Franklin House in Philadelphia. However, after lengthy discussion and debate, the Board realized that the costs associated with such an ambitious endeavor were too great.

In 2006 the high corners of the Ice House were leaning dangerously. After consulting with Mike Jackson of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, it was estimated that \$25,000 would be needed to strengthen the corners. The following year, HEF contacted Carr Associates in St. Louis, a firm that had successfully advised us on Farley's. For the Ice House, Carr Associates recommended removing vegetation growing on the walls, improving drainage on all sides of the structure, and replacing the loose interior fill with a more compact material. They also suggested adding a roof.

The principal concern at HEF Board meetings was to keep the structure from collapsing further, turning a picturesque ruin into a treacherous ruin. The Ice House had become a matter of public safety.

About a year ago the Board decided to make an all-out effort toward preservation. Board member Terri Darr agreed to manage the project, and took the lead in developing a partnership with Southern Illinois

University in Edwardsville. Darr contacted the Construction Management Department at SIUE for ideas to preserve and enhance the Ice House ruin. Students in the Structural Systems course developed two concepts. One was to preserve the Ice House and highlight it with a steel frame "ghost structure," similar to that used in Philadelphia. The other was to demolish the ruin and rebuild it as it was originally, to serve as a visitors' center. Though HEF had already abandoned both of those ideas as impossibly expensive, the student input provided a framework for moving forward.

HEF decided instead to preserve the Ice House ruin as is. With the support of SIUE faculty, HEF submitted a project grant application that involved installation of a picket fence around the ruin, a bike rack, some concrete benches and an information board, and delineation of parking areas and a walkway. The Ice House itself was to be restored so as to preserve what was still solid enough to be safe. If necessary, a concrete foundation would be poured, loose stones on upper reaches of the walls would be removed or reincorporated, and sections would be repaired and tuck-pointed.

On February 7, 2013, the Elsah Village Zoning Board gave permission to move forward with the plan. HEF submitted a request for a SIUE Meridian grant of \$3,360. The Board members felt proud to have taken specific action at last. Though the grant request was denied, the HEF Board understood the true value of the Meridian grant project to be the development of a specific manageable plan for the Ice House.

Some parts of the plan, those related to public safety and strengthening of the structure, have been or are being implemented. The south wall has been built up to the floor level of the original house, creating a more solid relationship between that wall and the existing east and west wall remnants. Questions remain about what further will be removed and/or rebuilt, as well as the height of the walls at project completion. We see the possibility of a parking area and will discuss this with Village officials. We see the need for a bike rack, and some type of interpretive signage to be located between the structure and the road.

There is a plan. We on the Board say with firm conviction and determination: YES, we expect to move forward. YES, we will work closely with the Village. YES, we will need money and intend to authorize a capital project as part of our commitment to the *presence of the past*.